



Commonwealth of Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Impact of West Virginia Chemical Spill to Kentucky Drinking Water Continues to Diminish

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Jan. 16, 2014) – The lengthy plume of the chemical known as 4-MCHM is making its way down the Ohio River with its leading edge expected to be near Louisville early Friday morning. Kentucky Department for Environmental Protection (DEP) officials say tests show the levels of the chemical are below the threshold established as a threat to public health by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“We have no indication that there have been, or will be, issues or risks to Kentucky residents,” said DEP Commissioner R. Bruce Scott. “Our staff scientists continue to receive samples and test water from the Ohio River and the final treated drinking water. Based on the latest data, we expect levels below detection in the treated drinking water.”

Wednesday, based on information from the CDC, the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health issued an advisory in West Virginia recommending that pregnant women use an alternative drinking water source, such as bottled water, “out of an abundance of caution” until the chemical is at a non-detectable level in the distribution system.

“While Kentucky has not received a similar recommendation from the CDC, we have evaluated the recommendations made to West Virginia and would like to make sure our citizens are aware of these precautions,” Commissioner Scott said. “Since raw intake water in Kentucky is testing below the CDC-established threshold and since public water systems are taking additional steps to treat the water prior to use and consumption, we fully expect all finished drinking water to be safe.”

The public water systems at Ashland, Russell, Maysville and Northern Kentucky Water District all closed their intake systems when the plume passed by earlier this week. Scott said the systems all used extra carbon treatment as an additional precaution on water withdrawn from the Ohio River since the plume passed by. Given those actions and water sample test results, he said there is no indication that the public has been exposed to levels of this chemical that would be of a health concern.

The agency will continue monitoring the path of the chemical plume and working with local water treatment facilities to continue assuring the public that they are receiving safe drinking water.

Kentucky Emergency Management has been monitoring the situation and has been coordinating daily meetings and conference calls with appropriate responding agencies and will continue until any perceived threat passes.

The chemical 4-methylcyclohexane methanol, known as 4-MCHM, was released last week into the Elk River, which flows into the Kanawha River at Charleston, W.Va. The Kanawha River flows into the Ohio River at Point Pleasant, W.Va. An estimated 300,000 residents in West Virginia were unable to use the water supply for a number of days.

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